and financial difficulties of the prospective buyers. The Government is seized of the position and is exploring various options.

Global Trade Powers Dragging India to dispute Settlement body of *W* T O

2193. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the present Government have overlooked "risks of international isolation in global trade arena" as reported in an article published in the Times of India, New Delhi, dated 20th July, 1997;

(b) whether global trade powers are trying to drag India to the dispute settlement body of the World Trade Organisation (WTO);

(c) if so, the reasons therefor indicating why India wants to continue to maintain Quantitative Restrictions (QRs) and slowe down the autonomous trade liberalisation process which began in 1991; and

(d) concrete steps taken so far by Government to avoid loss of India's export markets "abroad", "credibility' and "isolation" in global trade?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULI RAMAIAH): (a) No. Sir.

(b) to (d) The news item referred to in the question mainly deals with the consultations held in the Committee on Balance of Payments Restrictions of the World Trae Organisation (WTO) with India on the quantitative restriction on imports maintained by India under the provisions of Article XVIII : B of the General Agreement on Traffic and Trade (GATT), 1994. The news item mentions that India risked isolation in the global trade arena by refusing to notify an internationally acceptable time frame for eliminating barriers, and that the collapse of the talks has prompted global trade powers, including the EU, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Switzerland to initiate dispute settlement proceedings against India.

Government of India had presented to the WTO Committee on Balance of Payments Restrictions a plan for the elimination of residual quantitative restrictions on imports maintained under Article XVIII:B of the GATT. This plan was discussed at the meeting of the Committee held on 10—11 June 1997 and at the resumed meeting held on 30 June-1 July 1997, when due to divergence of opinion among Members of the Committee, the consultations concluded without consensus. Therefore, it may not correct to state that India was isolated during the deliberations of this Committee.

Some of the Members that had expressed the view that the time period under India's plan was too long, namely, Australia, Canada, the European Communities, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United State of America, in separate requests, have sought formal consultations with India under Article XXII of GATT 1994 and the Understanding in Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes (DSU) alleging that continued maintenance of quantitative restrictions on imports for balance of payments purposes by India when there have been improvements in India's balance of payments is inconsistent with India's obligations under the WTO. India has accepted the requests for consultations. There are indications that the complainants would like to work towards a mutually acceptable solution. India's approach to these consultations would also be similar.

Import of tocee uder OGL

2194. DR. D. VENKATESHWAR RAO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to place coffee under Open General Licence import scheme;

(b) if so, reasons for increase in domestic coffee prices; and

(c) the steps taken to prevent any further increase in coffee prices?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULI RAMAIAH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The coffee price realised is a function of demand and supply. Moreover, the domestic prices of coffee have started declining and at present these are mostly at par with the international prices.

Import of wheat

2195. SHRI AKHILESH DAS: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) what was the quantity of wheat initially proposed to be imported with details of exporting countries;

(b) the quantity that has been received so far with names of countries who exported this wheat;

(c) whether Government have a comfortable stock of procured and imported wheat;

(d) if so, whether Government propose to change its decision for import of the balance quantity of wheat; and

(e) if not, what are the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULI RAMAIAH): (a) and (b) Govt. had initially authorised import of upto 2 million tonnes of wheat during 1996-97. Against this, the State Trading Corporation of India contracted for import of a total quantity of 17.51 lakh tonnes of wheat from Australia, Canada and Argentina. The entire quantity of 17.51 lakh tonnes has already reached India by May, 1997.

(c) to (e) The wheat stocks in the Central Pool as on 1-7-97 is estimated at 10.97 million tonnes as against 13.10 million tonnes required to be maintained as per the Buffer Stocking Norms. Govt. has, after considering the relevant factors authorised import of an additional quantity of upto 2 million tonnes of wheat during 1997-98, of which the STC has finalised contract for import of 1 million tonnes in the first instance. Government costantly reviews the stock position of foodgrains in the Central Pool with reference to production of foodgrains in the country, the procurement trend, internal availability of foodgrains, requirement for Public Distribution System (PDS), foreign exchange resources, price trend in the national and International markets etc. and decision regarding import or otherwise of the balance quantity will be taken at the appropriate time depending upon the situation.

Surplus stock of Tabacco in the West and East Godavari Districts

2196. SHRI YERRA NARAYANA SWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Tobacco Board has made any survey of surplus stocks of tobacco in West and East Godavari Districts in the first week of June, 1997;

(b) if so, the findings thereof;

(c) the steps proposed to assist farmers by lifting such tobacco stocks; and

(d) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULI RAMAIAH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) and (d) Some of the steps taken by the Tobacco Board to assist tobacco farmers include:—

(i) Conducting auctions to ensure accurate weighment, classification and competitive prices;

(ii) Negotiating with tobacco trade for fixation of Mininmum Guaranteed Price for Flue Curred Virginia To-